



NRC NEWS

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NRC ISSUES REVISED DRAFT SAFETY EVALUATION REPORT ON PROPOSED MOX FACILITY IN SOUTH CAROLINA

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff has released a revised draft safety evaluation report concerning the construction of a proposed mixed oxide (MOX) fuel fabrication facility at the Department of Energy's (DOE's) Savannah River site near Aiken, South Carolina.

The revised draft report concludes that DOE's contractor, Duke Cogema Stone & Webster (DCS), has not yet met all of the applicable safety requirements pertaining to construction of the proposed facility in order to provide reasonable assurance of protection against natural phenomena and the consequences of potential accidents. Specifically, the report identifies 19 open items on which the NRC requests further information from DCS before a construction authorization can be granted. These items include questions about nuclear criticality safety, fire safety, chemical safety, and the confinement ventilation system at the proposed facility.

The revised draft safety evaluation report represents a snapshot of the staff's present positions, based on information received to date. It amends a draft report, issued April 30, 2002, that responded to DCS's initial construction authorization request for the MOX facility. DCS submitted a revised construction authorization request on October 31, 2002. Based on information contained in that document, the NRC staff has listed as closed 40 items raised in its earlier draft evaluation.

The revised draft safety evaluation report will be posted on the NRC's MOX web site, at <http://www.nrc.gov/materials/fuel-cycle-fac/mox/licensing.html>. The report will also be available through the NRC Public Document Room by calling 301-415-4737 or 1-800-397-4209.

NRC authorization is required before DCS can build a MOX facility designed to convert surplus weapons-grade plutonium supplied by DOE into MOX fuel for use in commercial nuclear power reactors authorized to use such fuel. DCS is required to submit a separate application for a license to operate the proposed MOX facility. Converting weapons-grade

plutonium into MOX fuel is intended to advance the cause of nonproliferation by converting the material into a form unsuitable for use in weapons. The program is part of a bilateral agreement between the United States and the Russian Federation that includes construction of a similar facility in Russia.

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